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TELEGRAM

February 08, 2003

To: No Action Addressee  
Action: Unknown  
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 676 - PRIORITY)  
TAGS: PREL  
Captions: None  
Subject: UAEG WELCOMES SECRETARY'S PRESENTATION BUT  
PUBLIC REACTION MIXED; DERISIVE RITTER SOUNDS  
OFF IN ABU DHABI  
Ref: None

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S E C R E T ABU DHABI 00676

SIPDIS  
CXABU:  
ACTION: POL  
INFO: DCM ECON P/M RSO AMB

DISSEMINATION: POL  
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:TEWILLIAMS  
DRAFTED: POL:STWILLIAMS  
CLEARED: POL:MMENARD

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PP RUEHC RUEHDE RUCNRAQ RHEHNSC RUEAIIA  
DE RUEHAD #0676/01 0391344  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 081344Z FEB 03  
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
INFO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8309  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 2784  
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000676

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STATE FOR NEA/NGA, SA/PAB AND NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2013  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [UN](#) [IZ](#) [TC](#)  
SUBJECT: UAEG WELCOMES SECRETARY'S PRESENTATION  
BUT PUBLIC REACTION MIXED; DERISIVE  
RITTER SOUNDS OFF IN ABU DHABI

REF: Abu Dhabi 629

[1](#)1. (U) Classified by Charge d'Affaires Thomas Williams for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

UAEG PRIVATELY SUPPORTIVE  
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[1](#)2. (S) Initial UAEG reaction to the Secretary's presentation has been very encouraging. UAE Information Minister Shaykh Abdullah Bin Zayid Al-Nahyan, who was in London on a private

visit, contacted the Ambassador in the U.S. to note that the facts presented were "credible and convincing." The Secretary's inclusion of Saddam's human rights abuses at the

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end "completed the package." Abdullah advised the USG to flood the Arabic media in order to underscore the Secretary's message. He said the UAEG intended to release a

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public statement supportive of the presentation (see below). We separately received positive feedback from Chief of Staff Shaykh Muhammad Bin Zayid Al-Nahyan (via his Amcit military advisor who conveyed points to NEA/ARP Director and Polchief). MbZ (the UAE's de facto Defense Minister) thought the speech was very powerful and depicted the real picture of the Iraqi regime. He wished that the Secretary had not made a connection between Saddam and Palestinian "terrorism" and underlined his oft-mentioned concerns that the optics of any potential conflict will be key in keeping a lid on popular Arab anger.

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SEMI-GOVERNMENTAL PAPER TAKES STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE  
EDITORIAL STANCE....  
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13. (SBU) The semi-governmental Abu Dhabi-based Arabic language daily "Al-Ittihad" (widely viewed as the UAEG's mouthpiece) on 2/6 issued a strongly supportive editorial, placing the onus entirely on Saddam (reftel). Noting that the Secretary had made a very tight case, "Al-Ittihad" commented that the presentation highlighted the very real limitations of the inspections' process, particularly in a country in which the regime has made an "art of survival." As the editorial put it, "The American submission, supported by images, phone intercepts, and detailed charts, left no room for extending the inspectors' mission and put extensive pressure on the Security Council to take urgent action to implement the serious consequences which the UNSC warned of if 1441 was violated." (Note: In our view, this editorial may well be the promised UAEG statement. Shaykh Abdullah is chairman of the board of the "Al-Ittihad" parent company Emirates' Media International and, in that capacity, is able to exercise considerable editorial authority. End Note.)

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...IN STARK CONTRAST TO OTHER, VERY NEGATIVE, REACTIONS  
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14. (U) The "Al-Ittihad" stance was not reflected in the editorial pages of the UAE's other papers. The 2/7 English-language "Gulf News" editorial, titled "Powell found wanting," charged that the Secretary's "swish" presentation had "all of the hallmarks of Hollywood and Steven Spielberg. But this was one spiel that did not travel well, probably little further than the doors of the Pentagon, the White House and 10 Downing Street." The editorial cast doubt on the credibility of the satellite photographs and telephone intercepts and noted that "it beggars belief that Iraq, known to have sophisticated intelligence systems themselves (sic), would not be conscious of the fact that all electronically transmitted messages would be liable to interception." The "Gulf News" editorial line was mirrored by the Sharjah-based Arabic daily "Al-Khaleej," which has traditionally taken a very critical, anti-American stance.

15. (U) Although he did not comment on the Secretary's presentation itself, longtime Mission contact and Dubai corporate leader Khalaf Al-Habtoor, in a 2/7 "Gulf News" op-ed, registered concern over what he described as the USG's post 9/11 spurning of multilateralism and embrace of the "first strike option." In Al-Habtoor's view, the mere threat of U.S. military action will be enough to force a regime change in Iraq.

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MIXED PUBLIC REACTION

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16. (SBU) While many of our interlocutors were critical of the presentation and used it as an opportunity to vent on U.S. policy towards the Middle East peace process, others took a more nuanced view. Several expatriates and Emiratis -- convinced that war is inevitable -- were alarmed by the mostly negative international reaction. In their view, the risks of inaction now solidly outweigh the risks of action. Our Iraqi expatriate interlocutors have been the most vocal, expressing irritation at the reaction of their fellow Arabs and advising us to just ignore the naysayers and get on with the job.

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SCOTT RITTER SOUNDS OFF AT THE ARAB LEAGUE'S ZAYID CENTER  
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17. (U) Former UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter found a largely receptive audience during a 2/8 lecture at the Zayid Center for Coordination and Follow-Up, an Arab League "research center" funded by UAE Deputy Prime Minister Shaykh Sultan Bin Zayid Al-Nahyan. Sultan attended the lecture, in a rare public appearance. Addressing the diplomatic and press corps, Ritter predictably derided the Secretary's "smoke and mirrors" presentation, noting that the U.S., bent on regime change, is determined to undermine the inspections' process. Ritter posited that as long as the U.S. focus is on regime change, the international community must remain suspicious of U.S. policy and all Americans assigned to inspection teams in Iraq should be considered intelligence agents. He described U.S. Iraq policy as being part of a grander design aimed at regional transformation and took issue with what he characterized as our unilateralist approach. Ritter predicted a popular Iraqi uprising against a U.S. occupation of Iraq, coupled with broader instability in the region which could result in the downfall of some Arab governments. Ritter's apocalyptic vision, and particularly his brash statements on the likely reaction of Iraqis led one Iraqi expat, a long-term resident here, to comment skeptically and rather indignantly to poloff in an aside "just who does Ritter think he is to speak for Iraqis"

WILLIAMS